

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson****“Moving Beyond the First Five Years:
Improving the Functionality, Governance, and
Accountability of the Department of Homeland
Security”**

April 23, 2008 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “Moving Beyond the First Five Years: Improving the Functionality, Governance, and Accountability of the Department of Homeland Security”:

“I would like to welcome Acting Deputy Secretary Schneider, on behalf of the Members of the Committee.

Last September, you appeared before this Committee for the first time. At that time, you testified about GAO’s report assessing the Department’s progress over the past four years.

GAO found that the Department’s implementation of critical programs is substantially hindered by the lack of strategic planning and management, risk management, information sharing, agency transformation, partnership formation and internal and external coordination.

Last September, the Committee pressed the Department to improve its functionality, governance, and accountability.

I am sure you and I can agree that the Department of Homeland Security must operate in the spirit of excellence in order to effectively secure the Nation.

I hope your testimony demonstrates that the Department is taking affirmative steps to strategically plan for the transition from this Administration to the next Administration.

History demonstrates that we are most vulnerable during a leadership transition.

The World Trade Centers were first struck February 1993, at the start of the Clinton Administration and then again in September 2001 during President Bush’ first term.

Similarly, the mass transit terrorist attacks occurred in Madrid just three days prior to Spain’s 2004 election.

England’s Prime Minister Brown was installed for only two days when two bomb-laden

cars were detected and disabled.

Given the fact that DHS has never experienced a Presidential transition, it is absolutely imperative that the Department is ready to carry out its mission.

Now, Mr. Schneider, the last time you testified before the Full Committee, you had only been in the post as Under Secretary for Management for nine months.

The Department balked at the Committee's request to send us your predecessor who was then responsible for managing the Department's day-to-day operations.

Today, the Department has again sent you to testify about the transition of the Department, but this time, it's in the stead of Secretary Chertoff.

What is even more unsettling is that when the Committee sent the Department letters back in February about the Committee's intent to "examine the Department's ongoing transition process to ensure a seamless and orderly changeover," both you and Secretary Chertoff failed to share the information requested with this Committee, which as you know is charged with oversight of the Department.

Specifically, the Department claimed that the transition planning documents were

- (1) under development;
- (2) constitute Executive Branch materials; and
- (3) that you would share them first with the incoming Administration.

Let me state emphatically, that the refusal to answer this Committee's inquiry contradicts Secretary Chertoff promise and his obligation to provide Congress with the Department's transition plans and activities.

In fact, at the FY 2009 DHS budget hearing on February 13th, Secretary Chertoff told this Committee – "I think we owe it to you" – when asked about the Department's transition plans and activities.

Yet, when Committee staff contacted the component offices at DHS to prepare for a series of hearings regarding the transition and the Department's plans beyond its first five years, they were told that you and the Secretary had ordered them not to comply with the Committee's request.

Let me be clear: The Department must not evade its responsibility to this Committee, Congress, or to the American people.

The Department must be accountable for its transition plans. It must be equally accountable for its other mishaps whether we are talking about formaldehyde in the Katrina trailers or spy satellites.

I am confident that you will keep this in mind as you detail the Department's transition plans in your testimony.

I will close by saying - once again – that we owe the American people security. We owe them accountability. And most importantly, we owe them freedom from fear."

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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